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religious doctrine more important than any other. Of course we must not import Christian ideas into the earlier scriptures; but equally, in the comparatively few instances when the earlier scriptures take pains to formulate a doctrine, and teach it dogmatically, we are not at liberty either to deny it or to leave it in the background.

The New Testament uses the statements concerning Abraham very prominently for teaching the doctrine of justification by faith. We are so familiar with this that we have allowed it to lead us to neglect the equally evident fact that upon these same passages, more than upon any other part of the Old Testament, the New builds its doctrine concerning the Messiah. The apostles taught that the Messiah was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham; that the religious movement they were introducing was the carrying forward of that by which the nations were to be blessed through the father of the faithful. Thoroughly to have this in mind is to have at hand the solution of many difficulties concerning the religion of the Bible, and the means of gaining a larger and worthier conception of many of its most precious truths.

HEBREW PROPHETS AND PROPHECY.

BY PROFESSOR R. V. FOSTER, D. D.,

Theological School, Cumberland University, Lebanon, Tenn.

II.

A few words concerning the nature of the prophetic office. A prophet, or *nabi*, was not one merely who foretold future events. Indeed, he may not have foretold at all, and yet have been a prophet. This was a mere accident of his office, though as a matter of fact it does abound in the recorded utterances of the Old Testament prophets. But a prophet was one who spoke for another as his authorized agent, or representative. The word, or message, may or may not have been a prediction. It was simply the revelation of a fact, whether of a permanent and general nature, or one pertaining to the past, present, or future. It is true that the mass of the people was always more impressed, for the time being at least, by the miracles or predictions of the prophets than by their spiritual ideas; and it is easy to be explained why, after the permanent withdrawal of the prophetic gift, still greater weight has been laid, by both Jews and Christians, upon the predictive element of the prophecies which have been preserved. But it remains true that prediction was only one of the means whereby prophecy would accomplish its end. Prediction was not the whole even of heathen manticism, with which some have so incorrectly allied Hebrew prophecy. The object of both was to inform man how to do what was right and pleasing to the Being whom it regarded as supreme. But even a slight comparison of the two with each other enables us to see how far manticism fell below prophecy. Prophecy is unique. It is characteristic only of the religion of Israel, nothing closely resembling it being found in Mohammedanism or the religion of any other Semitic peoples. Indeed, the religion of Israel, as is well known, was peculiarly hostile to all forms of sorcery and soothsaying, upon which the prophets failed not to pronounce over and over again severe denunciation. They were sins which could be classed only with the worst.

Prophecy admitted that a knowledge of the future was desirable; but one of its functions, perhaps the one which comprehended all others, was to enable the Israelitish nation to know *what kind of knowledge* of the future could alone be pleasing to God and a blessing to man, and not merely to gratify an idle or selfish curiosity concerning the future. Prediction held the same relative place in God's dealing with his Old Testament people that miracle held in the hand of Christ. In healing the blind or feeding the five thousand he had an object in view beyond the mere restoration of sight or the satisfaction of hunger. These, obviously, were only incidents—suitable means to a far higher end. Prophecy employed prediction only when it was needful to do so, fulfilling its function not merely, perhaps not mainly, by the miracle of foreknowledge, but also by pointing the eyes of the nation backward to the holy and righteous government of God as manifested in their own history, and to the aims of divine providence as exhibited in that history. The object thus sought was to qualify the people to anticipate and thereby avoid possible judgment, to walk conscious of and ever mindful of their own mission as the chosen people and of the great future which this involved, ever regarding it as beneath their dignity to yield to the natural yearning for soothsaying. They already knew *their* future; they did not, like the heathen, need to be informed, and the words of the prophets were to be regarded as rather of the nature of reminders. "Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they . . . are soothsayers like the Philistines" (Isa. ii. 6). "And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers" (Mich. v. 12). Or in other words, the office of prophecy was to promote the interest and unfold the ways of the kingdom of God. It was constantly retrospective, but it was so in order that it might be prospective. It looked backward in order that it might draw such lessons from history as would enable it to look ahead.

There is a form of rationalism which holds that the prediction of particular events, which also in many instances fell within the sphere of prophecy, is inadmissible on the ground of its destroying human freedom and thereby interfering with history. History implies freedom, they say; but if the prophet predicts that Israel will, then Israel must; and there is no longer freedom and hence no longer history. But rather than reject the possibility of history, the rationalists of this school prefer to reject the possibility of the predictive element in prophecy. This view must be summarily rejected. We are not driven to such an alternative. The course of the world is not entirely, perhaps not even mainly, dependent on the arbitrary decisions of the human will. And yet man is free. But the freedom of history is the freedom of God. He rules.

Heathen manticism was a failure. It appealed largely to idle or selfish curiosity, and left the people as it found them. Hebrew prophecy was not a failure. But this difference was the outcome of a deeper difference. Instead of appealing to idle or selfish curiosity, Hebrew prophecy was not infrequently in direct and dangerous antagonism with it. The prophet lost his head; the mantis knew how to drive a good bargain, and did it. A mantis was merely, or pretended to be merely, the ecstatic utterer of an oracle, unconscious, irresponsible; and his utterances were made with unnatural distortions. *Malvesthai* hints strongly of the foaming mouth and streaming hair. The facts are in harmony with the etymology. Not so with Hebrew prophecy, whatever the etymology of the word *nabi* may seem to imply to the contrary. We read of no cases of frenzy or even facial distortion.

If the words of the prophet bubbled up, or boiled at all, it was only in the sense that the words of honest, and earnest, and entirely responsible thinkers and speakers have often done the same thing. The Psalmist says,

"My heart was hot within me;
While I was musing the fire kindled;
Then spake I with my tongue" (xxxix. 3).

And Jeremiah: "If I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing" (xx. 9). It was this that made the words "boil forth" in the case of the prophet. Heathen manticism was only a form of divination. Hebrew prophecy in its active form was interpretation, in its passive the reception of a revelation. There was no incantation about it, no art, no ceremony, no formula of any sort. But the magicians could do, or pretend to do, only by means of "their incantations;" they could speak only after consulting the horoscope, or inspecting the entrails of a victim. Philo and the Alexandrian school were wrong, identifying as they did, though perhaps unintentionally, Hebrew prophecy with manticism. "The human understanding," says Philo, "takes its departure on the arrival of the Divine Spirit, and, on the removal of the latter, again returns to its home." Josephus substantially repeated Philo's words (*Antiq.* book iv., ch. vi. 5). So did the Christian father Tertullian. "For when a man is rapt in the Spirit," says he, "especially when he beholds the glory of God, or when God speaks through him, he necessarily loses his sensation, because he is overshadowed with the power of God—a point concerning which there is a question between us [the montanists] and the carnally minded" [the other Christians]. (Against Marcion, book iv. chap. xxii.). He calls the prophetic state *amentia*. But the words quoted are surely a sword which might be made to cut most dangerously in the very direction in which neither Philo, nor Josephus, nor Tertullian, would wish. This view, however, of the prophetic state was not the one generally held by the fathers. They generally believed that the true prophets, who were filled with the Spirit of God, were still able to discharge their prophetic functions with "a quiet and tranquil mind." Origen (e. g.) says that if the soul "encounter no perturbation or alienation of mind whatever from the impending inspiration, nor lose the free control of its will"—it is proof that it is moved by the indwelling, or suggestion, of a good spirit (*Princ.*, book iii. chap. iii. 4). He instances the case of the prophets.

God did, however, at times employ the vision and the dream in communicating his word, or message, to man. But it was not the dream, and it was not the vision, of any form of manticism. The visions of Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and Daniel, find no correspondence in heathen theology. But these were not God's usual mode of communicating his message. The more ordinary mode was by direct revelation and manifestation, through a divine impulse given to the prophet's own thoughts. He was caused to think something which, ordinarily, he would not, and could not, have thought. This constituted his inspiration, or prophetic state.

Generally, he was still in his waking or ordinary physical condition. His mind was in a state of passivity only in the sense that it was in a receptive attitude, though this receptive attitude may at the same time have been one, and doubtless often was one, of intense alertness. It was this condition of mental alertness, indeed, which rendered the man capable of becoming an inspired prophet; or, in other words, became in him the basis on which the Holy Spirit could operate. Of

course God could transform lifeless stones into prophets; and only in this sense was it possible for God to constitute any man at random an inspired prophet; for not every man had the natural endowments or acquirements which were necessary at the outset as a substructure for the supernatural. What Isaiah was when "moved by the Holy Ghost," depended very largely upon what Isaiah was when *not* moved by the Holy Ghost. Two men may have the same teacher and yet become very unequal scholars. Two men may see the same objects, or read the same history, and yet draw from them very different lessons. The holy men of old spake as they were moved, and they were moved in accordance with what they were before they were moved. But they did not reach the subject-matter of the heavenly message by any process of reasoning. It boiled up in the prophet's consciousness, and boiled forth in oral speech. But from the message communicated to him he might by processes of reasoning deduce others; or, the reflective faculty being awakened, he might endeavor to understand what he had uttered. But they did not in every case, at least, succeed. "And I heard, but I understood not," said Daniel; "then said I, O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things? And he said, Go thy way Daniel; for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end" (ch. XII. 8). And Peter affirms of the prophets generally that they "sought and searched diligently," as miners search in the earth after precious metals, concerning what time and historical circumstances the Spirit of the pre-existing Messiah had reference to when he testified to them of the salvation which should come (1 Pet. i. 10). The question, therefore, What did the prophet understand by his message? is by no means identical with, What does the message mean? or, What did the Holy Spirit intend by it? And this last question it was not possible, in many cases, for either prophet or people to fully answer.

But notwithstanding this, all Hebrew prophecy is characterized by its remarkable practical character. While the people did not know all the end aimed at, they knew it well enough. Prophecy was not intended exclusively for the contemporaries of the prophets; and these contemporaries knew very well, or might have known, all that was intended for them. When the prophet said, "Turn ye, turn ye, O house of Israel," as he did say over and over again, in one way and another, the people knew very well what that meant. And when he said "Retribution," which also, in one phraseology or another, was one of the "burdens" of prophecy, the people understood very well what that meant. They may not have understood all that it meant for some future generation, but they understood enough of what it meant for them. So also when the prophet uttered a message of promise. It might have been couched in enigma, or symbol; but whether so or not, the people could always know that it meant *something* good, though they might not know any of the particulars. They could distinguish the rainbow from the cloud; the promise from the threatened retribution. It was not necessary for them to know the details. The people, like the prophets themselves, needed always to be kept on the alert; and the only way to keep them on the alert was for them to always have in mind the question, I wonder what sort of good thing this is that is promised? I wonder what sort of evil thing this is that is threatened? By hope and apprehension should they be saved, both as individuals and as a nation. And the same principle still obtains. It would be far from best for us to understand all prophecies.